

Here is Hoving on the art historian Bernard Berenson. "[He] sometimes distressed his colleagues with his inability to articulate how he could see so clearly the tiny defects and inconsistencies in a particular work that branded it either an unintelligent reworking or a fake. In one court case, in fact, Berenson was able to say only that his stomach felt wrong. He had a curious tingling in his ears. He was struck by a momentary depression. Or he felt woozy and off balance. Hardly scientific descriptions of how he knew he was in the presence of something cooked up or faked. But that's as far as he was able to go."

Snap judgments and rapid cognition take place behind a locked door. Vic Braden tried to look inside that room. He stayed up at night, trying to figure out what it is in the delivery of a tennis serve that primes his judgment. But he couldn't.

I don't think we are very good at dealing with the fact of that locked door. It's one thing to acknowledge the enormous power of snap judgments and thin slices but quite another to place our trust in something so seemingly mysterious. "My father will sit down and give you theories to explain why he does this or that," the son of the billionaire investor George Soros has said. "But I remember seeing it as a kid and thinking, At least half of this is bull. I mean, you know the reason he changes his position on the market or whatever is because his back starts killing him. He literally goes into a spasm, and it's this early warning sign."

Clearly this is part of the reason why George Soros is so good at what he does: he is someone who is aware of

the value of the products of his unconscious reasoning. But if you or I were to invest our money with Soros, we'd feel nervous if the only reason he could give for a decision was that his back hurt. A highly successful CEO like Jack Welch may entitle his memoir *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, but he then makes it clear that what set him apart wasn't just his gut but carefully worked-out theories of management, systems, and principles as well. Our world requires that decisions be sourced and footnoted, and if we say *how* we feel, we must also be prepared to elaborate on *why* we feel that way. This is why it was so hard for the Getty, at least in the beginning, to accept the opinion of people like Hoving and Harrison and Zeri: it was a lot easier to listen to the scientists and the lawyers, because the scientists and the lawyers could provide pages and pages of documentation supporting their conclusions. I think that approach is a mistake, and if we are to learn to improve the quality of the decisions we make, we need to accept the mysterious nature of our snap judgments. We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that—sometimes—we're better off that way.

### 1. *Primed for Action*

Imagine that I'm a professor, and I've asked you to come and see me in my office. You walk down a long corridor, come through the doorway, and sit down at a table. In front of you is a sheet of paper with a list of five-word sets. I want you to make a grammatical four-word

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